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No. LX.

FRENCH'S STANDARD DRAMA.

SIMPSON AND CO.

A Comedy,

IN TWO ACTS.

BY JOHN POOLE, ESQ.

WITH THE STAGE BUSINESS, CAST OF CHARACTERS, COSTUMES, RELATIVE POSITIONS, ETC.

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NEW YORK:
SAMUEL FRENCH,
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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

| | <i>Drury Lane.</i> | <i>Park, 1847.</i> | <i>Arch et. Phil. 1847.</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Mr. Simpson</i> | Mr. Terry. | Mr. Bass. | Mr. Burton. |
| <i>Mr. Bromley</i> | " Cooper. | " Dyott. | " Howard. |
| <i>Foster</i> | | " Gallott | " Fisher. |
| <i>Servant</i> | | " Heath. | |
| <i>Mrs. Simpson</i> | Mrs. Glover. | Mrs. Vernon. | Miss Cushmar |
| <i>Mrs. Bromley</i> | " Davidson. | " Abbott. | " Smith. |
| <i>Mrs. Fitzallan</i> | " West. | Miss Horn. | " Rogers. |
| <i>Mad. La Trappe</i> | " Orger. | Mrs. Dyott. | " Booth. |

COSTUMES.

The Costumes are those of the present day, Mr. Simpson wearing a plain gray or brown suit.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES.

R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; R. D. *Right Door*; L. D. *Left Door*, S. E. *Second Entrance*; U. E. *Upper Entrance*; M. D. *Middle Door*

RELATIVE POSITIONS.

R., means *Right*; L., *Left*; C., *Centre*; R C., *Right of Centre*
L. C. *Left of Centre*.

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

THIS sterling little comedy, from the pen of Poole, has kept possession of the stage for the last twenty-five years, and from its intrinsic excellence, is entitled to a place in the "Modern Standard Drama."

It has been said by an able critic of the day, that "we are deficient in comedy, because we are without characters in real life." Society has certainly become so fused in its character, that an uniform phase is outwardly presented to the world. Our angular points wear off by attrition; and individual eccentricities are now less prominent, than in the days when our early comic writers found such ample materials for their imperishable works. There are, doubtless, less subjects afforded for the display of strong and marked characters on the stage, in this age of refinement and intellectual progress, than were presented when the grades of society were more distinctly separated, and each class furnished specimens which the skilful dramatist could convert into a source of infinite entertainment to his audiences. And yet the author of "Simpson & Co." has contrived to select from the ordinary walks of society a few characters of an entirely common-place character, and by the aid of elegant and sprightly language, dramatic incidents, and humorous situations, to produce a piece that invariably amuses an audience, and is likely to maintain its position on the stage, as long as genuine comic humour is relished by the public.

The original cast of this comedy combined the talents of Terry, John Cooper, Mrs. Glover, Mrs. Davidson, Mrs. W West, and Mrs. Orger—all *artists*, in that sense of the term in which only it should be used; and the long career of success the piece experienced on its first production at Drury Lane, may in

great measure be attributed to the individual excellences of these distinguished performers.

We have lately seen two excellent casts of Simpson & Co in this city—at the Park and at Palmo's. Bass. at the Park gave great unction and effect to *Mr. Simpson*, while Mrs. Vernon was equally rich in her delineation of his jealous helpmate Dyott and Mrs. Abbott were also above mediocrity as *Mr.* and *Mrs. Bromley*. At Palmo's nearly the same cast was presented Mr. W. B. Chapman being the *Mr. Simpson*, a part that is admirably adapted to his peculiar quaint and truly comic style. The piece had a run of several nights, and drew forth as hearty peals of laughter and applause, as, perhaps, ever greeted its representation with its originally powerful cast. H

SIMPSON AND CO.

A C T I.

SCENE I.—*A Handsome Apartment in the House of Simpson and Co.*

BROMLEY *discovered at a table, writing.*

Brom. [*Laying down his pen.*] Ought I to pursue this adventure? If I proceed, the destruction of my wife's happiness and my own may—psha! under my assumed name of Captain Walsingham, what have I to fear? I'll finish my letter, though, like the others, it may be returned, or unnoticed. [*Writes.*] “And rely on the entire and eternal devotion of your adorer, Charles Walsingham:—New Hummums.” [*Folding it.*] Charles Bromley, of Mincing-lane, merchant, partner in the house of Simpson & Co., and married, transformed into Captain Walsingham! [*Directing the letter.*] “To Mrs. Fitzallan, Harley street.” [*Seals it.*] There! [*Rises and comes forward.*] There's a fatality in this wild adventure! Charmed by a beauty in an opera box, I dog her carriage, and learn that she is a Mrs. Fitzallan, widow of an officer lately dead in India. Under pretext of arranging some business for her, in which I find she is concerned with the India Company, I call on this Mrs. Fitzallan—am cursed coldly received by Mrs. Fitzallan; call again, and am completely cut by Mrs. Fitzallan; make my bow, and resolve to think no more of Mrs. Fitzallan; stroll into the Exhibition, and the first portrait I see is that of the lovely Mrs. Fitzallan! I contrive to get a miniature copy of the portrait, and conceal it by a secret slide in my pocket-

book. [*Pulls out the pocket-book and contemplates the portrait.*] 'Twas rash; but who could behold such beauty and—
[*Kissing the picture.*]

Enter FOSTER, R.

Fos. Pray, sir, will you—

Brom. [*Hastily closing his pocket book.*] Well, Foster! what now? what's the matter?

Fos. Young Mr. Lovemore is in the counting house, and desires to know, sir, whether you will advance him the thousand pounds he spoke to you about?

Brom. What, I advance money to enable a married man to supply the extravagances of a mistress?

Fos. You know, sir, we have consignments on his account from his estates at St. Domingo, to four times that amount.

Brom. That is nothing to the point, Mr. Foster. However, you may refer him to my partner, Mr. Simpson; he may find *him* less scrupulous. [*Exit Foster, R.—Re-opening his pocket-book.*] What eyes! what a complexion! what expression! Many a pocket-book on 'Change is crammed with riches; but where find one that clasps a treasure equal to this?—After all, am I very, very much to blame? Where is the husband who—My partner loves his wife dearly; but, spite of his demure looks and rigorous principles, even he, I'll answer for it, has some little indiscretions, that—here he comes—I'll sound him, and perhaps I may make him a useful confidant.

Enter SIMPSON, R.

Simp. Good news, Bromley, good news; the Bank has discounted every shilling of our paper.

Brom. Aye, indeed! My dear Simpson, I am delighted to hear it.

Simp. The firm of Simpson & Co. stands as high as any house in London, and our signature is a bank-note to the very Bank itself. Have not I always told you that our partnership would be a fortune to us?

Brom. True, true; and our connexion in commerce is so natural; why, we had a kind of rehearsal of our present partnership in very early days. At school, you know—though *there*, to be sure, you had much the start of me

in age, for you were in the highest firm, when I was in the lowest—

Simp. Yes; I left Doctor Thwackum's to begin my clerkship, just six months after you came to his academy.

Brom. But, though only at Thwackum's together for half-a-year, you recollect, Simpson, how I made you join me in all my frolics; and now in business—

Simp. In business, I grant you, our labours and our profits are pretty equally divided. At school, the case was different. I was never a frolicksome boy, and, as you say, considerably your elder; but, somehow or other, whenever you opened an account of mischief, our master always drew upon my shoulders for the unsettled balance of drubbings.

Brom. Well, in business, at least, we are more exact; and, if we are fortunate, we may fairly boast that we deserve to be so. Attentive, industrious—

Simp. Always looking to the main chance—

Brom. Domestic in our tastes—

Simp. Economical in our habits—

Brom. Neither of us run-abouts, nor men of intrigue—

Simp. Faithfully attached to our wives, and loving them solely and entirely, as they love us—

Brom. Inhabiting the same house, in peace and harmony; not the slightest altercation—

Simp. Altercation! your wife is mildness itself; so confiding, too, in your attachment to her!

Brom. And yours!—

Simp. My wife? she is a treasure! but, still, for all that—

Brom. For all what?

Simp. You know, Bromley, I have no secrets from you; my wife is a little—Mrs. S. is rather too susceptible on the score of jealousy.

Brom. To be plain with you, I have sometimes fancied so. Now, between ourselves, my dear fellow, have not you given her some cause to—? Yes, yes, you have.

Simp. What, I? never!

Brom. None! Ha! ha! ha! Come, come, Simpson.

Simp. [With emphasis.] None—none—poz—

Brom. Now I like your making a mystery of it to me. Men, you know, are not remarkably severe towards each

other—besides, if you had, where would be the great harm of it?

Simp. A married man, and ask me where's the harm of it!

Brom. You love your wife, I know, and study her happiness: but you would not have me believe that when a little adventure happens to fall in your way—

Simp. Harkye, Mr. Bromley; a good husband never goes where little adventures are likely to fall in his way.

Brom. [*Aside.*] 'Tis lucky I did not trust my secret to him.

Simp. My notions of conjugal fidelity are strictly moral. A husband, like a merchant, is bound to fulfil his engagements. Mrs. S., in marrying me, drew upon me for my fidelity for life; I accepted the draft, and 'tis my duty to honour it.

Brom. But, unlike bills of exchange, the longer the date of one's matrimonial engagements the more difficult they are to provide for. But enough: I know your sentiments, as you are acquainted with mine; and all I have just now said to you—

Simp. Was intended as a hoax, perhaps?

Brom. Nothing more.

Simp. I don't like such hoaxing. No, no; what I was before marriage, I still am—the sworn enemy to nonsense. I was born for the counting-house and a steady life; and even in my younger days, whilst others were gadding about to Vauxhall, and play-houses, and running their heads into all manner of scrapes and troubles, I was usefully employed in working decimals and calculating exchanges.

Brom. Ha! ha! ha! Perhaps I never met you on a certain fine summer's evening, taking a sentimental ramble along with—

Simp. And what then? She had but just come up with me in the fields, and was asking me the way to Islington;—but didn't you step in, like a friend, and whisk her away, assuring me you did it for my good? But come, let us to the counting-house, and answer our Lisbon letters.

Brom. And after that I'll treat you with a walk to the West End before dinner

Simp. Impossible ; I have busines at the custom-house, and you must stay at home to deliver up the securities to Mr. Tradely, who will call this morning as per appointment. You may as well take them at once ;—here they are. [*Gives papers to Bromley.*]

Brom. Very well ;—Mr. Tradely's securities ;—there they are, safe till he calls. [*Puts them into his pocket-book.*]

Simp. By the bye, your treat with a walk to the West End, is to drag me all the way from Mincing-lane to Harley street.

Brom. [*Alarmed.*] What do you mean ? [*Aside.*] Can he have discovered !

Simp. Do you remember some weeks ago, how you kept me blowing my fingers, in the cutting east wind at the end of March, tramping up and down before the iron rails of a house in Harley street ?

Brom. [*Aside.*] My first visit to Mrs. Fitzallan !

Simp. "Wait at the door, my dear Simpson, I shan't be a second." My nose was as blue as an orang outang's.

Brom. Well, well, I didn't detain you long.

Simp. Long !—And the second time ? There was I fretting, and trotting backwards and forwards, looking up at the windows, down into the area, watching every movement at the street door, freezing, shivering, swearing—What the deuce have you to do in Harley street ?

Brom. Oh !—The recovery of a little debt due to me before we entered into partnership.

Simp. Do you expect to lose any thing in that quarter ?

Brom. No—not exactly ;—but I may wait a long time before my demands are satisfied.

Simp. Aye, I understand—"Call again to-morrow."—Well, I wish you success ; but if ever you entrap me with you to Harley street again—Ha ! here comes your wife.

Enter MRS. BROMLEY, L.

Brom. Returned so soon, my love ?

Mrs. B. I have just met with an agreeable surprise, Charles. You've often heard me speak of my old school friend, Marianne.

Brom. Well ?

Mrs. B. Shortly after my leaving school, she returned

to her family in Somersetshire, and the last I heard of her was, that she was gone to India. Imagine my pleasure, when, just now, on going into my milliner's, there I met my dear Marianne. You may suppose, that, after so long a separation, we had much to say to each other.

Brom. No doubt.

Mrs. B. But there was such a crowd at the milliner's we had little time to talk—I forgot even to ask her where she lived.

Brom. That was unlucky; for how are you to meet again in this wide world of London?

Mrs. B. Oh! I took care of that, for I have engaged her to dine.

Brom. That was right, my love; whatever contributes to your pleasure, is agreeable to me.

Mrs. B. You are too kind, too attentive to me, Charles.

Brom. Aye?

Mrs. B. I should be unjust, were I to deny that I am the happiest woman in the world.

Simp. Not so fast—one of the happiest, if you please; for I flatter myself that Mrs. S. is equally so.

Mrs. B. By the bye, you and Susan must be of the party.

Simp. With great pleasure; and come—as I am satisfied with our morning's business, 'gad, I'll stand treat to a box at the opera for the evening!

Mrs. B. Heyday, Mr. Simpson, you?

Simp. Mrs. S. last night dropped a hint that she should like to go; and as gallantry is my—but, come, business before all; let's to the counting-house, Bromley.

Brom. One kiss at parting, Anna; I'll soon be with you again.

Simp. Come, Bromley, come; what the deuce—who thinks of parting kisses when once he is married. Come, business before all. [*Exeunt Bromley and Simpson, L.*

Mrs. B. Yes, I am, indeed, the happiest of wives.—How few among my married acquaintance whose peace is undisturbed by discontents and bickerings—by jealousy too often well-founded—how blest, then, am I, in the possession of a man whose thoughts never wander from his own fireside

Enter MRS. SIMPSON, L.

Good morning, my dear. Why, bless me, what ails you? you seem out of spirits.

Mrs. S. No—not I. It was late when you came home last night?

Mrs. B. The concert was longer than usual.

Mrs. S. Ah me! While you and Bromley were amusing yourselves at a concert, I was moping alone in the chimney corner.

Mrs. B. And Mr. Simpson? was not he there to keep you company?

Mrs. S. No; he was busy all the evening in his counting-house—[*Aside,*] as he said.

Mrs. B. Well, this evening will make amends to you for the last. I expect an old friend to dinner; you will dine with us, and afterwards we all go to the opera. It is to your good little man we are indebted for this treat.

Mrs. S. Ah! my good little man is very obliging.

Mrs. B. Now, really, you ought to be more thankful to him, considering that he himself is not fond of public amusements.

Mrs. S. So he says, and I suppose I must believe him—yet he often goes out, very often.

Mrs. B. Do you know, my love, I sometimes think you are jealous?

Mrs. S. No, I am not, nor do I believe I have any cause to be so; yet I wish my husband were less fond of the counting-house, and more assiduous in his attentions to me—in short, that he would follow the example of yours.

Mrs. B. Consider that men's characters differ; that Mr. Bromley is, by some years, a younger man than—

Mrs. S. I am aware of all you would say, but—

Mrs. B. But! Surely you delight in tormenting your self.

Mrs. S. I am not jealous; but when I look about among our neighbours, men who all adore their wives—Ah! my dear! Some through vanity, others from mere inconstancy of character.—Why, there's our next-door neighbour, Mr. Honeymoon, who loves his wife to distraction, yet was not he seen the other day in a tilbury

with an opera-dancer? And as for Mr. Ledger, over the way, who doats upon Mrs. L.—if what the world says be true—

Mrs. B. But be assured that Mr. Simpson is none of these.

Mrs. S. I hope so; but those men, those men! there's no knowing them, believe me.

Enter a SERVANT, L.

Servant. A French lady, calling herself Madam La Trappe, desires to speak with you, ma'am.

Mrs. B. With me? I know no such person. But request her to walk in.

Servant ushers in MADAME LA TRAPPE—a small parcel in her hand.

Mad. L. Mi ledi, I have the honneur to salute you I will to speak wid my ledi Bromley.

Mrs. B. If you mean Mistress Bromley, madam, I am the person.

Mad. L. Mistress, I am your servant—Madame La Trappe, from Paris. [*Looking cautiously about.*] I sell de littel contraband—I smuggle de littel marchandize from Paris—I am recommend to you from mi ledi Ledger, over de vay—I have de advantage to sell to her many littel ting vat I smuggle, and I sall be proud to take the advantage of you.

Mrs. B. Pray, madam, don't give yourself the trouble.

Mad. L. Trouble! Oh, Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! is no trouble for so amiable ledi—[*Turning and curtsying to Mrs. Simpson,*] for so amiable two ledi—and some lace which was make for Madam La Duchesse;—Mon Dieu! I not remember myself—here is forty yard, I sell for two guinea one yard.

Mrs. S. Two guineas a yard! that's extremely dear.

Mad. L. Oh, madame!—mais madame is so amiable, I sell it for one guinea.

Mrs. B. Really, ma'am, we cannot buy anything to-day.

Mad. L. Mais, madame, c'est egal, you sall not buy, but I have much pleasure to make you see.—Here is de veil, it is pretty as one argel. Ha! ha! ha! ha! I tell you—it was a *sentiment* one great *mi lord* buy for two

hundred guinea for Mam'selle Pirouette, of de Grand Opera.—Ha! ha! ha! Dat poor mi lord! he gave it her to-day; to-morrow she sell it to me, and yesterday I sall sell it to everybody else.

Mrs. B. Once more, ma'am, I must beg you will give yourself no further trouble.

Mad. L. [*While making up her parcels.*] Dat is vell, madame; I come to-day, because I have to receive fifty pound in de bureau—de counting-house down de stair.

Mrs. S. To receive fifty pounds!

Mad. L. Oui, madame, one littel acceptance of Monsieur Simonison; I receive it of one very pretty ledi, beautiful, who buy of me some lace—Madame—Madame—I forget her name, but she live in Harley-street.

Mrs. S. A lady in Harley-street paying for lace with an acceptance of my husband's!

Mad. L. You know de gentleman vat live in de counting-house?

Mrs. B. Yes, we—

Mrs. S. [*Interrupting her.*] No, ma'am, no; do you!—Let her speak, my dear, let her speak.

Mad. L. I know him—dat is, I only know him from to see him.

Mrs. S. Aye, you saw him at the lady's house?

Mad. L. Oh, no, madame, I will not say so, because it will not be true; beside, if I did see him, I am too discreet—Oh, Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! But how I know him, it is so—Ha! ha! ha! ha!—It make me laugh when I tink—Two time I see him wait at de door, he walk up and he walk down, backward and forward; and he stamp, and he swear, and he look in great rage, like he was jealous, and he look at de window, and de door—you understand—

Mrs. S. Go on, ma'am: pray go on.

Mad. L. De first time I make no attention to him; but when I see him vash two time before de door, I tink—Ah! ha! Monsieur! Yet you know, madame, dat vas only suspect; but when I come to-day to touch my fifty pound—Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! it is droll, I see de gentlemen vat I see walk about before de house of de pretty ledi.

Mrs. S. Are you certain the gentleman you have just now seen is the same?

Mad. L. Oh! madame, vid his littel sanctify look—
Ha! ha! ha!

Mrs. B. And what does it signify whether it be or not?

Mad. L. Mi ledi, I beg pardon to derange you; when you sall want de lace, de glove, de rouge, &c., I sall sell you for very littel gain, and you sall not forget Madame La Trappe. [*Curtseys.*] Mi ledi, I have de honneur to salute you, I am your very respectable servant, indeed.—
[*Mrs. Bromley follows her to the door.*] Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! madame, do not give yourself de pain. I sall call again last veek vid some beautiful dress as vat you see—and I can tell you more vat please you about the other gentilhomme, in the bureau down stairs, and perhaps—comme j'espere—anoder littel acceptation for fifty pound de ledi will give me for what she is going to buy wid it—sans façon, sans adieu—jusqu' au revoir.

[*Exit, L.*

Mrs. S. Well, my dear, what say you to this?

Mrs. B. Oh! the idle talk of a chattering French dealer in smuggled goods.

Mrs. S. Idle talk! Then how comes it that this pretty lady pays for lace with my husband's acceptance?

Mrs. B. The acceptances of the house are negotiated like bank-notes, and, passing from hand to hand, one may have fallen into the possession of the lady in Harley street. Upon the same grounds I might as reasonably suspect Bromley.

Mrs. S. Bromley, indeed! no, no.—Besides, it was not Bromley she recognised in the counting-house; Bromley wasn't "de littel sober gentilhomme" she twice saw watching the house in a jealous fury; and isn't the gentleman "with a littel sanctify look," as she calls it,—the exact description of my husband? She has said quite enough to satisfy me.

Mrs. B. Be calm, my dear; all this will be satisfactorily explained to you, and you will be the first to laugh at your suspicions. For the present, keep what you have heard a secret from every body, and above all from your husband.—[*Aside.*] The hypocritical villain!

Mrs. S. Well, I'll endeavour, by concealing what I know, to learn more. Nor do you, on any account, mention it to Bromley.

Mrs. B. Be assured, I will not.

Mrs. S. The monster! if he be guilty, I promise you that before two days have passed over his head he shall —The cruel monster! I could almost cry with vexation.

[*Bursts into tears.*]

Mrs. B. [*Aside.*] Poor Mrs. Simpson! She is really to be pitied, poor thing!

Enter SIMPSON, gaily, R.

Simp. So, here you are, Susan, my dear. Business is over for the day, and now I am at your disposal. 'Gad, I believe I must begin to copy Bromley, and run out of the counting-house every half hour to visit my wife.

Mrs. S. [*Dryly.*] Indeed, sir! Upon my word—I never before saw you so gallant.

Simp. True, my duck, true! I mean to make amends.

Mrs. S. To be plain with you, sir—a little change in your conduct would be very desirable.

Mrs. B. [*In an under voice, and as if anxious to prevent a quarrel.*] My love—

Simp. Well, from this time forward you shall find me quite another thing; every leisure moment I have shall be yours. I'll act the lover, rather than the husband; I'll be a downright Romeo, ha! ha! ha!

Mrs. S. Your determination to reform is rather sudden, sir.

Simp. Don't throw cold water over me, my darling; don't you see I'm gay, I'm joyous? On making up my accounts of happiness, I find a large balance of content in my favour; business goes on swinmingly; I've a wife whom I love; and—in short, all my little arrangements are mighty comfortable.

Mrs. S. [*Aside.*] His little arrangements!—I congratulate you sincerely on your comfortable little arrangements, Mr. Simpson.

Mrs. B. [*To her.*] Pray, have a care.

Simp. Mr Simpson! and sir!—this is very strange? What the deuce is the meaning of all this coldness and formality?

Mrs. S. Ask that of yourself, sir; look into your heart, and you will there discover the cause.

Mrs. B. [*Checking her.*] Hush!

Simp. Look into my heart? I may look into it for a month, and the chief article I shall find there, will be a large stock-in-hand of love for my Susan.

Mrs. S. [*Aside.*] The perfidious wretch! [*Goes up.*

Simp. Something is the matter, that's certain. We parted good friends an hour ago; what has happened to put you out of humour, since? [*She turns from him.*] Mrs. Bromley, can you explain? What crotchet has my wife got into her head now?

Mrs. B. [*Coldly.*] 'Tis nothing, sir, nothing—'Twill pass away, I hope. [*To Mrs. Simpson.*

Simp. A word, Mrs. Simpson, if you please. You have the good luck to be married to a plain man, who—

Mrs. S. [*Turning quickly upon him.*] Well, sir, I know I am married to a plain man; and what then?

Simp. Why, then, madam, he loves you honestly and sincerely; he does his utmost, madam, to make you happy, and—and—zounds, madam, what would you have more?

Mrs. S. [*Aside.*] Who would have thought the traitor could carry it off so well?

Simp. Come, Susan, give me your hand, and let's have an end of this; and, till you have recovered your good temper, you had better retire to your own room.

[*Crosses, R.*

Mrs. B. [*To Mrs. Simpson as she goes off.*] Pray, pray, be more the mistress of yourself.

Mrs. S. Ah! my dear, this blow will be the death of me. [*Exeunt Simpson and Mrs. Simpson, she reluctantly giving him her hand.*

Mrs. B. Who would have suspected him? Heavens! —Should the man corrupt my Charles! Nothing so dangerous for a husband as the society of persons of Mr. Simpson's character. Here he comes.

Enter BROMLEY, R.

Well, Charles, you know what is going forward.

Brom. No, love; what?

Mrs. B. Poh! poh! you know it as well as I do.

Brom. Upon my honour, I cannot even guess what you allude to.

Mrs. B. 'Tis all discovered

Brom. [*Aside.*] Discovered!—Does she suspect—

Mrs. B. About Simpson, you know.

Brom. Simpson!

Mrs. B. His poor wife knows all about it.

Brom. About what, my love?

Mrs. B. His intrigues.

Brom. His intrigues? Simpson's intrigues? poh! impossible. [*Laughing.*

Mrs. B. Nay, 'tis useless now to pretend ignorance; we have just learnt what you might have known long ago.

Brom. I have known! what have I known?

Mrs. B. That he has a mistress.

Brom. What, Simpson! The philosopher, the sober steady—Ha! ha! ha! that's excellent! Come, tell me all about it, my love; tell me all about it.

Mrs. B. Oh, my dear Charles, I'm delighted! I perceive by your manner that you know nothing of it. I was fearful that you were in his confidence, and to say the truth, that would have made me uneasy.

Brom. I in his confidence! No, no, he knows me too well; I should have lectured him roundly, had he hinted—[*Aside.*] 'Gad, I was afraid I had been found out myself!

Mrs. B. Only imagine—a French dealer in smuggled lace—a Madame La Trappe, who has just been here, not knowing Susan, related to us—but what am I doing?—Simpson, as yet, knows nothing of the discovery we have made, and I have promised Susan to keep the secret till—

Brom. Well, but you may tell me, Anna—I long to hear all the particulars—trust me—I'm dumb, you know.

Mrs. B. No—no—no—and I am to blame for having mentioned it to you at all.

Brom. Who would ever have thought this? And Simpson, of all men in the world!

Mrs. B. Really—ha! ha! ha!—really, of the two partners one would rather have suspected you than him.

Brom. Ah! nothing is so little to be trusted in as appearances.

Mrs. B. And now, Charles, I've a favour to ask of you. Mr. Simpson, no doubt, is a very honourable man in business, very correct in trade; but you are a younger man than he, and I seriously entreat you not to go our

too frequently with him; there's no knowing how he may mislead you—it may be catching.

Brom. You have nothing to fear on that score—I know him now.

Mrs. B. There's a good boy. Now I'll just go to poor Susan, and do what I can to comfort her.

Brom. Do, love; but don't remain long away from me.

Mrs. B. No, dear, I'll soon return. Ha! what a happy woman am I. *[Exit Mrs. Bromley, L.]*

Brom. So, so, Mr. Simpson; you have your little frolics abroad as well as another, I find. The hypocritical cur, with his long face and crabbed morality this morning, “when I but merely hinted at the possibility of—but really this is too bad! an avowed mistress! My case is very different; I regard my wife sincerely; so that should I even form a little attachment with Mrs. Fitzallan, there is no danger of its disturbing my domestic peace. Besides, as she knows me only as Captain Walsingham, and—“Oh, hang it, I'm not so indiscreet as my partner.” Ha! here he comes, the rogue. I possess his secret; he is ignorant of mine, so I'll make the best of my advantage, and torment his little sly soul out.

Enter SIMPSON, R.

Simp. There she sits mumping, and sulking, speaking half words, and—Ah! Bromley—there's my duck in the temper of a hyena, and I'll just ask you why?

Brom. You needn't ask me! you know well enough.

Simp. I know! I'll be bound she herself does not know; but woman's whims—

Brom. Harkye, my dear fellow: I am your friend—you know I am—as you would be mine under similar circumstances. I have promised my wife to say nothing to you about the matter, but let me put you on your guard. *[Looks cautiously around, and then whispers.]* It is a cursed awkward business—it is all discovered.

Simp. Discovered! What's discovered? Who has discovered? What's the discovery?

Brom. Your wife, poor thing—she knows all about it.

Simp. Does she?

Brom. Yes, she does; and she has told mine.

Simp. And, pray, what has she told her?—and what do they both know?

Brom. That confounded Madame La Trappe!—Why didn't you bribe her to hold her tongue? She has been here, and blabbed the whole affair.

Simp. And who the devil is Madame La Trappe?

Brom. Why, the French smuggler, you know.

Simp. Curse me if I know any smuggler—French or English. Is every body out of his senses to-day?

Brom. No, sir, no, we are all *in* our senses. But Madame La Trappe, whom you affect not to know, yet who knows you perfectly well, has exposed all your peccadilloes: In short, she has divulged to your wife, that in a certain sly corner—you understand—

Simp. No, I don't; what do you mean by a sly corner?

Brom. Why, not to mince the matter, you keep a girl.

Simp. I keep a girl!—Let me tell you, Mr. Bromley, this is a bad joke—a damned bad joke—and I don't allow of jesting on such a subject.

Brom. Oh! no, to be sure; it was but this morning you said to me, with that puritanical face of yours—"My marriage promise is as sacred as my acceptance."

Simp. So it is, sir.

Brom. Egad, then, if this be your way of honouring your conjugal acceptances, you'll soon lose your credit in the bank of Hymen.

Simp. Plague upon you, and Hymen, and Madame La Trappe, and the whole firm of you.

Brom. Nay, if you are angry, I have no more to say. But now, coolly: the best of us may go astray, and if you can't help being such a terrible Turk after the women—

Simp. A Turk! I, a Turk!

Brom. Aye—it's constitutional with you, I suppose.—Why, then, face it out to your wife, and swear you're innocent; but denying the fact to me—man to man—poh! it's ridiculous.

Simp. Mr. Bromley, for the last time I beg you'll drop the subject; I am not to be made a butt for your ribaldry.

Brom. I have done; "I have acquitted myself of a task of friendship, and have but one word to add—you are watched dogged, and surrounded with spies; but "since you won't let me help you out of the scrape"—go—I abandon you to your unhappy fate.

Enter FOSTER, R.

Fos. A letter, sir; the bearer says it is of the greatest importance.

Simp. [*Opening it.*] Ha! from our bankers. [*Reads.*] "*Private. We have strong reason to believe that the house of Snakely and Co., which is indebted to yours upwards of eight thousand pounds, is on the point of stopping payment*"—So, here's wherewithal to put an end to your jesting.

Brom. Unlooked-for disaster! What's to be done?—Three thousand, money lent.

Simp. We wanted but this to complete the pleasure of the morning.

Brom. [*In the greatest agitation.*] Go to them, Simpson—no—I'll go myself—Foster, send for a coach—or, stop, it is but a step, I shall go faster a-foot. Be calm, my dear fellow, be calm—Foster, make out a statement of this—no, rather—[*Taking Simpson's hand,*] leave it to me, I'll talk to them—I'll see what's to be done with them—I'll return instantly. [*Going.*]

Simp. [*Calling after him.*] Hold! hold! the securities I gave you, and which Mr. Tradely is to call for.

Brom. Aye, true, the securities—at such a moment as this, I hardly—What the devil have I done with them?

Simp. You put them into your pocket-book!

Brom. Did I? I—I'm so flustered—[*Feeling in his pockets.*] Oh! here they are; you'll find them in this, and—[*Gives Simpson the pocket-book.*] This is a dreadful blow, but I'll see what can be done. Come with me, Foster, come. [*Exit Bromley in the greatest agitation, followed by Foster.*]

Simp. A charming morning, indeed! a quarrel with my wife about nothing, and a failure in business to the amount of eight thousand pounds. Oh! I begin to perceive that in matrimonial, as well as in mercantile speculations, when one comes to make out the account of profit, a plaguy deal must be set down to per contra creditor

[*Exit, L.*]

END OF ACT I.

A C T I I.

SCENE CONTINUES.

Enter SIMPSON, L.

Simp. Thanks to the intercession of Mrs. Bromley, I am friends with my wife ; she has pardoned me, as she is pleased to express it, though I'm as innocent as a new-born babe. This was our first quarrel, and pray heaven it may be the last ; for, from this little specimen, I am certain that when a man's better half is discontented, t'other half has a damnable time of it.

Enter MRS. BROMLEY, L.

My dear Mrs. Bromley, how much am I obliged to you ; out for you I had been a lost man.

Mrs. B. Mr. Simpson, I am glad I find you alone ; I desire a little private conversation with you.

Simp. With me ?

Mrs. B. Pray, look whether any one is within hearing, close the door, and hand me a chair.

Simp. [*Placing the chairs.—Aside.*] What is all this to lead to ?

Mrs. B. [*After a short pause, and very seriously.*] Mr. Simpson—you know my regard for your wife ; you know I consider Susan and you as our best friends ; and it is natural I should take a deep interest in all that concerns you.

Simp. You're a kind soul ; if it hadn't been for your interference just now—

Mrs. B. Well, well, it has had its effect ; I am persuaded, therefore, you will not take amiss my speaking to you upon this very delicate subject.

Simp. No, ma'am—no—no.—[*Aside.*] Something new, I suppose.

Mrs. B. Then, sir, if you are not too far gone, [*Simpson starts,*] I would prevent the recurrence of the unhappy disagreement your misconduct has occasioned—

Simp. My misconduct ! it is an invention, a libel, a calumny, and I never in my life—

Mrs. B. I had prepared myself for all you would say, Mr. Simpson; but listen to me as your friend; the past will be forgotten, but for the future—pray, pray, Mr. Simpson, let the scenes of this day serve you as a warning; and do not you, either by bad counsel, or pernicious example, corrupt my poor Charles.

Simp. I corrupt him! I!—don't drive me stark staring mad.

Enter MRS. SIMPSON, L.

Mrs. S. [*Endeavouring to suppress her passion.*] Very pretty—sweetly pretty, indeed—I congratulate you—I—I admire your taste, Mr. Simpson.

Simp. My taste! in what?

Mrs. S. She is very handsome, I must allow—it would be difficult to make a better choice.

Simp. Again!—the same eternal, infernal subject!—
[*Aside, and as if startled by a sudden thought.*] Lord help me! Is it possible I could have gone astray without knowing it?

Mrs. S. Twenty, or two-and-twenty at the utmost; blue eyes, ruby lips, complexion like a rose—

Simp. [*Unable any longer to suppress his anger.*] Madam, what is your reason for all this? am I to be made the laughing-stock of the whole house? During this entire day, have I been worried by one or the other. Can there be any thing like appearances against me? Let me see—on Tuesday I supped with my old aunt; Wednesday—

Mrs. S. Don't be at the trouble of inventing excuses.

Simp. Not I, madam; I shan't condescend to justify myself. Flesh and blood can bear this no longer! Do what you please, say what you please, call me what you will; and since you are determined to be jealous, hang me if I haven't a great mind to take the trouble of giving you cause—Mrs. Simpson! [*Exit, L.*]

Mrs. B. [*Aside.*] His manner convicts him.

Mrs. S. It's the way with them all; when they have nothing to say in their defence, they assume the airs of the injured party.

Mrs. B. But, my dear, what's the meaning of this altercation?

Mrs. S. The profligate little imagines that just now I

saw his red morocco pocket-book lying on his writing-table. I know not what impulse prompted me to open it, but finding nothing in it except papers of business—securities, I believe—I was going to replace it, when I perceived a spring in the corner; I pressed upon it, removed a secret slide, and there, to my horror, discovered—

Mrs. B. Letters?

Mrs. S. Worse! the creature's portrait.

Mrs. B. Abominable!—[*Aside.*] Charles shall positively dissolve partnership.

Mrs. S. She is handsome enough, but so much the worse. And he!—to hear him one would think his whole soul is wrapt up in me; but I know him now; I have found him out at last, the perfidious monster!

Mrs. B. You have done well to conceal from him your discovery.

Mrs. S. Oh, my dear, had I mentioned it to him, he would have sworn it was the portrait of some sixteenth cousin in Yorkshire, or a lady to whom he paid his addresses in his youth.

Mrs. B. No doubt of it.

Mrs. S. But I'll confound him yet. I replaced the book just where he left it—but their letters—their letters! No doubt, the dear souls occasionally write to each other—I'll contrive to obtain possession of some of their tender epistles, and we shall then hear what the wretch will have to say for himself.

Mrs. B. Susan, my love, instead of anger and reproaches, the common error of offended wives, endeavour to reform him by kind and gentle remonstrances. Except in hearts utterly depraved, these wild attachments are seldom of long duration, when opposed by the disinterested affection of a wife.

Mrs. S. True, true, I'll—I know not what I'll do. But here comes Mr. Bromley. Ah! Anna, you are a happy woman! Let me quit you, my love, for the very sight of a faithful husband renders my monster more odious to me.

[*Exit, L.*

Mrs. B. Poor thing! my heart bleeds for her.

Enter BROMLEY gaily, R.

Brom. [*Speaking as he enters.*] Where is my partner? I

have recovered the whole of our debt, and now—where is Simpson?

Mrs. B. Oh, Charles, don't name him. Did you but know what has passed during your absence!

Brom. What, more evidence against the gay deceiver?

Mrs. B. The wretch! But I'm glad you are returned, for, though he does not deserve your intercession, you must, for his wife's sake, endeavour to restore harmony between them.

Brom. Me, my love! this is a very delicate affair; and for me to interfere—

Mrs. B. You are, in all respects, the properest person. Besides, in these cases, example goes a great way; and, by holding up to him your own excellent conduct as a—

Brom. True, true; but my conduct—that is, it would appear like vanity in me to—besides—in a word, my love, what would you have me say to him?

Mrs. B. Say to him, Mr. Bromley! Do you, then encourage him in his wicked doings?

Brom. What, I!—[*Aside.*] I shall betray myself.—[*With affected energy.*] I encourage him? 'Tis infamous! 'tis abominable! I'll read him such a lecture as shall make him sink into the earth; I'll overwhelm him with—

Mrs. B. Do with him as you please, love; do not spare him, for we now have the most positive proof of his having a mistress.

Brom. [*Eagerly.*] Is she pretty?— [*Checks himself.*

Mrs. B. Blue eyes, ruby lips, complexion like a rose.

Brom. [*Aside.*] Exactly like Mrs. Fitzallan.

Mrs. B. But were she an angel, her beauty is no apology for him.

Brom. Certainly not, certainly not. What business has the husband of one of the prettiest women in the city to be running after angels? 'tis scandalous, 'tis.—[*Aside.*] I'm in a cursed awkward position here, and the sooner I get away the better.—But I'll attack him at once; I'll lecture him; I'll Hector him; and he must reform his conduct, or no longer call me his friend.

Mrs. B. You are right, my love; for, as it is, the man is no company for you.

Brom. No; I've done with him; I've no pity for a man who goes astray—[*Aside.*]—and wants address to guard against detection.

[*Exit, R.*

Mrs. B. I doubt his success; Mr. Simpson, I fear, is a hardened sinner. Besides, he knows too well the purity of my Charles's principles, to confess his error to him.

Enter a SERVANT, L.

Serv. Mrs. Fitzallan, ma'am.

Mrs. B. Mrs. Fitzallan? I'm not acquainted with the woman. [*Looking out.*] Ah! 'tis Marianne.

[*Exit Servant, L*

Enter MRS. FITZALLAN, L.

My dear Marianne, my earliest friend, how delighted I am to meet you once again.

Mrs. F. After a separation of five years, at length we meet. How often have I thought on my old school-friend. I have a thousand things to ask, a thousand things to say to you.

Mrs. B. But, before I answer you a single question, you must tell me all that has happened to you since you left England.

Mrs. F. Ah! my dear!—My history, though short, is a sad one. You heard of my going to India; there I married General Fitzallan, and within two years after our marriage—

[*Weeps.*

Mrs. B. How! already a widow!

Mrs. F. Too true.

[*Sighing*

Mrs. B. Come, come, love; this is the day of our reunion, and I shall insist on your being very gay.

Mrs. F. Well, well.—And you, too, are married?

Mrs. B. Yes, sure; I am settled down in Mincing Lane, in the midst of invoices, ledgers, and bills of lading; I am a plain, sober, city wife.

Mrs. F. And your husband? Come, tell me all about him. Is he an old stumpy little man in a grey coat and a brown wig? or young and handsome, and—like the beings at the other side of Temple Bar? and is he kind and attentive to you? And are you happy together?

Mrs. B. That, indeed, we are; but you will see him presently, and I'll answer for it you will be delighted with him. If he have a fault, it is that his fondness for me renders him almost ill-bred in his behaviour to every other woman.

Mrs. F. Don't attempt to correct him; 'tis an uncommon fault with husbands.

Mrs. B. That's true; few men are like Bromley.—
[*Looking cautiously around.*] Now, there is my husband's partner, Mr. Simpson—Peter Simpson—a pretty name for a gay deceiver!—

Mrs. F. That name is familiar to me. Oh! I remember—I received some acceptances of his in payment from my poor husband's executor.

Mrs. B. Well—only conceive—his wife, poor thing—

Mrs. F. Does he neglect her?

Mrs. B. He's a wretch! We have the most positive proof against him. I do all I can to console poor Susan, but what can avail in such a case!

Mrs. F. Oh! these men, these men! And the inconceivable effrontery of some of them! What think you, for instance, of a man I never saw before in my life—one Captain—Captain—Captain Walsingham, who, without any sort of introduction, twice presents himself at my house, under pretence of settling some business for me at the India House?

Mrs. B. Is it possible! and how did you receive him?

Mrs. F. As his insolence deserved, of course; and for some time I heard no more of him. But within these few days he has dared to write to me. His first letter I returned to him unanswered, but he so pesters me with his epistles, that I find it less trouble to burn them unopened. Then I can scarcely stir from home but he follows my carriage, and—in short, his importunities are become so irksome, that I am half determined to apply to the magistrates.

Mrs. B. Hush! here comes the unhappy pair.—

[*They walk up the stage.*]

Enter SIMPSON and MRS. SIMPSON, L.

Simp. [*Speaks on entering.*] Oh! with all my heart—separate maintenance, or no maintenance at all, if you prefer it—so you will but cease to torment me.

Mrs. S. I'm not the woman, Mr. Simpson, to bear such wrongs tamely; I have relations, and—

Mrs. B. [*Coming hastily forward.*] For Heaven's sake! here's a visitor—I must present to you a dear friend of mine—Mrs. Fitzallan.

Simp. [*Bowing.*] Any friend of Mrs. Bromley's—Madam, your servant.

Mrs. S. I am delighted, ma'am, to—[*To Mrs. Bromley.*] Oh! support me, my dear, I'm fainting.

Mrs. B. What is the matter?

Simp. [*Taking her hand, which she hastily withdraws.*] What ails you, my duck?

Mrs. F. The lady is very pale.

Mrs. S. [*Repulsing her.*] 'Tis nothing, madam—'tis past—it was merely the surprise. There are persons [*Half directed to Simpson,*] who can support a surprise without the slightest change of countenance. Mr. Simpson, I dare say, is of my opinion.

Mrs. B. I perceive nothing very surprising, my dear, in a simple introduction to an old friend of mine.

Mrs. S. The lady is not altogether unknown to me nor to Mr. Simpson either.

Simp. To me! I don't recollect ever having had the honour of seeing the lady before.

Mrs. F. I go but little into society, ma'am; may I inquire where you—

Mrs. S. This gentleman is more competent to answer the question than myself, madam.

Mrs. B. [*Aside.*] What can she mean?

Simp. [*In an under tone and with suppressed anger.*] Madam, let me advise you, for your own sake, not to expose your folly to a stranger.—[*Aside.*] I wonder she has not attacked fat Betty, the cook, or old Sally, the housemaid.

Mrs. S. [*To Mrs. Fitzallan.*] Pray, madam, did you ever sit for your portrait?

Mrs. F. [*Laughing.*] I now perceive the occasion of your surprise. No doubt you saw my portrait in the Exhibition; and the likeness, which was, indeed, allowed to be perfect, has led you to imagine—Ha! ha! ha!—and my black velvet dress—did you remark how finely that was painted?

Mrs. S. [*Aside.*] Black velvet! 'tis that—there's no longer a doubt. I am perfectly well acquainted with the miniature, madam, but it was not at the Exhibition I saw it.

Mrs. F. A miniature? you mistake: a full length picture.

Mrs. B. [*Aside.*] Can her jealousy have so blinded her? — [*Aloud and laughing.*] I begin to understand the meaning of this; but, take my word for it, my dear, you were never so mistaken in your life.

Mrs. F. [*Aside.*] Good heavens! Can I be the cause of any disagreement here?

Simp. Well, ladies, to me all this is a riddle; I have lived in a riddle this whole day; as I never was very apt at guessing riddles, I shall quietly leave to time the task of expounding this.

Enter BROMLEY, R.

Brom. Well, love, 'tis near dinner time; are you sure your friend Marianne will come?

Mrs. B. [*Pointing to Mrs. Fitzallan, whose back is turned to Bromley.*] She is here, Charles. Marianne, I must present my husband to you—Mr. Bromley.

Mrs. F. This gentleman—Mr. Bromley?—

Brom. [*Overwhelmed with confusion, yet pointedly and rapidly.*] Is the husband of your friend, madam.— [*Aside.*] I wish I was up to my neck in a horse-pond!

Mrs. F. I congratulate you sincerely, sir, on your choice. We were just speaking of you; Mrs. Bromley has emphatically eulogised your undivided attention to her, and no one is more desirous than myself to believe that you fully merit her confidence.

Brom. [*Greatly embarrassed.*] Oh, madam! when the heart—when a wife—when a husband, whose constancy, whose fidelity—a virtue now departed from with impunity — [*Aside.*] I'm dished!

Mrs. S. [*To Simpson.*] Do you hear that, base man?

Simp. Yes, I hear; though I understand nothing about it. However, I'm determined to be silent, and we shall see which of us will be tired soonest.

Mrs. B. [*To Bromley, and pointing towards Simpson.*] You are too severe, my love; be compassionate—a little indulgence— [*To Mrs. Fitzallan,*] am I not right?

Brom. A little indulgence—aye, aye, a little—we all have need of it—besides, at an age when the passions, and when—after all, there are greater sinners than we! Eh, Simpson?

Simp. [*Aside.*] It seems as if Bromley's turn had come

Well, turn and turn about—my wife and I have need of a little rest, that's certain.

Brom. And when one considers the weakness—the—the less I say the better.

Mrs. F. That, sir, is exactly my opinion.

Mrs. B. I am glad, Charles, to find you so weak an advocate in so bad a cause.

Mrs. F. To put an end to a conversation which must be exceedingly embarrassing to a certain person of the party—pray tell me, Mr. Bromley, whether you happen to be acquainted with one Captain Walsingham?

Brom. [*Aside.*] The cruel little devil!—Yes, ma'am; I'm not quite—yes, yes, I knew him—ma'am; that is—ma'am, I knew him formerly.

Mrs. B. [*Aside.*] I regret that Charles was acquainted with so disreputable a person.

Mrs. F. Do tell me what is his character, Mr. Bromley.

Brom. His character? Oh, he's a—a sort of a—a perfect man of honour, I assure you, ma'am.

Mrs. F. No doubt; he seems, too, to be a devoted slave of the ladies.

Mrs. B. Pray, Charles, present my respects to your Captain Walsingham. Mrs. Fitzallan has related to me a little anecdote concerning him, which places him very high in my esteem.

Brom. What, then, you know—[*Aside.*] Can she have told!

Mrs. F. Do you know, Mr. Bromley, whether he still maintains his influence at the India House?

Brom. [*Pointedly.*] No, ma'am; he's now an ex-director; has abandoned all intentions of further interference in that quarter.—How shall I get out of this? Here, William—a—let's have dinner, d'ye hear? it's full time.

Enter a SERVANT, R.

Serv. Dinner, sir, won't be ready this half-hour.

[*Exit, R.*

Brom. Very well.—[*Aside.*] John deserves a guinea for interrupting the conversation.

Simp. [*Gaily.*] Come, Bromley, go and order a bottle of champaign in honour of our fair guest; that will set us all in good humour; and before the third glass has

gone round, I warrant it, we shall all have come to a right understanding. Ha! ha! ha!

Mrs. B. Oh, let the butler look to the wine; and you, Charles, show Marianne our collection of pictures—I'll follow in a moment.

Brom. [*Aside.*] How I am to escape, heaven knows!—Your arm, madam.

[*Exeunt Bromley and Mrs. Fitzallan. Simpson offers his arm to Mrs. Simpson; she rejects it, and follows the others.*]

Mrs. B. [*To Simpson, as he is going off.*] Mr. Simpson, a word. Considering your situation, your boisterous gaiety, to say the best of it—is ill-judged.

Mrs. S. Mr. Simpson, your braving it out in this manner is positively indecent.

[*Exit Mrs. Bromley, who also rejects his arm.*]

Simp. Vasily well—let them say what they will, I'm determined not to open my mouth 'till dinner's ready

[*Exit, R.*]

SCENE II.—A Drawing Room with Pictures.

Enter MRS. FITZALLAN, R.

Mrs. F. Poor Mr. Bromley; he has some modesty, however, and couldn't bear a moment of examination.

Enter MRS. BROMLEY, R.

Mrs. B. What, has Bromley left you already? how rude!

Mrs. F. Rude!—I think the folks are all rather singular—he saw me to the door, bowed, and left me. Then, really, my dear, Mrs. Simpson's behaviour to me is very extraordinary; she does not only avail herself of my presence to torment her husband, but I am evidently the object of all her sarcasms and inuendos.

Mrs. B. Did you ever happen to see Mr. Simpson?

Mrs. F. No; never.

Mrs. B. How comes it, then, that he possesses your portrait?—

Mrs. F. My portrait?

Mrs. B. Which he keeps concealed in his pocket-book.

Mrs. F. Nonsense: impossible.

Mrs. B. I assure you, Marianne, he has it; and the resemblance is, in all respects, so perfect, that it cannot be attributed to chance.

Mrs. F. The profligate monster! But to what base end can he have procured it? and by what means?

Mrs. B. 'Tis difficult to tell. Perhaps, unobserved by you, he may have seen you somewhere or other, and becoming enamoured of you, contrived to procure a copy of your picture at the exhibition.

Mrs. F. [*Aside.*] I rather suspect.—My dear, are you sure, are you quite sure, that Mr. Simpson is the person capable of—

Mrs. B. Capable! After the discoveries we have made to-day, I'm convinced he is capable of any thing.

Mrs. F. [*Aside.*] One partner torments me with letters, the other purloins my portrait—am I fated to turn the heads of the whole firm of Simpson & Co.?

Mrs. B. Here he comes, expecting, no doubt, to find you alone, and prepared with a formal declaration.

Enter SIMPSON, R.

Simp. My dear Mrs. S. seems inclined to open a fresh account, but as we have had sufficient dealings in the article of bickering for one day, I leave her to—Ah! Mrs. Fitzallan, your humble—and Mrs. Bromley, too—I hope I am not an interruption.

Mrs. B. On the contrary, sir, this lady and myself desire an opportunity of gently and quietly remonstrating with you. Mr. Simpson, your conduct is most atrocious.

Mrs. F. 'Tis barbarous!—'tis ungentlemanly!—'tis unmanly!

Simp. Madam, if ever I—

Mrs. B. What excuse have you for endangering, as you have done, the reputation of a respectable woman?

Simp. [*In anger.*] I vow and declare, that since the day I was born—

Mrs. F. Will you be so obliging, sir, as to answer distinctly, the questions I shall put to you?

Simp. So! a regular examination! Speak, ladies; state your charges; I shall not employ counsel, but plead my own cause.

Mrs. F. Then, sir, I must insist on your answering me

seriously, and without equivocation :—Till this day, did you ever see me before ?

Simp. Seriously, and without equivocation, I never did.

Mrs. F. Has any person—any one who may take an interest in me—made you the depository of his secret ?

Simp. Madam, I assure you till this day I never had the pleasure either of seeing you or of hearing you spoken of.

Mrs. F. Enough. Now, sir, as a man of honour, you cannot refuse to relinquish my portrait, your possession of which is, at once, offensive and injurious to me.

Simp. Your portrait ! your portrait, ma'am !—*[Aside.]* Oh, hang it, I see now they are quizzing me for my wife's jealousy. Mrs. Bromley first began running the joke against me to-day, as a hen-pecked husband ; and now she has got Mrs. Fitzallan to join her.

Mrs. B. *[To Mrs. Fitzallan.]* He hesitates.

Mrs. F. Am I to be honoured with your answer, sir ?

Simp. *[Aside.]* 'Gad, I'll have a hoax as well as they, and turn the tables on 'em.—Well, madam, *[To Mrs. F.]* I confess that I have as truly got your portrait—

Mrs. B. At length, then, you confess ; that is the first step towards repentance. Your wife is an excellent woman ; repent, Mr. Simpson, and I trust she will pardon you.

Enter Mrs. SIMPSON, R.

Come, come, my love, let me be peacemaker.—Mr. Simpson has confessed his errors, and promises sincere repentance, and you must forgive him.

Mrs. S. And what have you to say for yourself, Mr. Simpson ?

Simp. What have I to say for myself ? I have merely said, that as truly as I have that lady's portrait she has mine, and I will restore her beautiful bust when she gives me my little full length.

Mrs. F. Sir !

Simp. Yes, my little full length—in a pepper and salt coat, striped waistcoat, and drab-colour small-clothes, and continuations.

Mrs. F. *[To Mrs. Bromley.]* My dear, the man's mad

Simp. As to the letters you say have passed between us—

Mrs. F. [*With dignity.*] This is too much; I should be forgetting the respect I owe myself, were I to remain another moment here.

Mrs. B. [*Taking her hand.*] For my sake, Marianne—yet an instant—

Enter BROMLEY, L.

Simp. Now, Charles, follow my example and confess—tis your only hope.

Brom. [*Alarmed.*] Confess! What?

Simp. Confession and repentance are the order of the day. Acknowledge, that, but for your example, I never should have gone astray.

Brom. [*Aside.*] Am I, too, detected, then!

Simp. Acknowledge that your wicked counsels first perverted my innocent heart; that you are accountable for all my peccadilloes, as you call them.

Brom. [*Agitated.*] Each for himself, sir, if you please.

Mrs. B. Fie on you, Mr. Simpson.—First calumniate my friend, and next accuse my unoffending husband! Shame, shame, Mr. Simpson.

Mrs. S. Your attempts at evasion will avail you nothing; it is not with Mr. Bromley, but with you, sir—

Simp. 'Tis all one—we are partners; and our pleasures and our plagues ought to be in common. [*Observing the serious countenances of the others.*] Lord help me! should they be in earnest, after all!

Enter a SERVANT, L., who whispers Mrs. Bromley.

Mrs. B. Instantly.—[*To Mrs. Fitzallan.*] A good opportunity to humiliate Mr. Simpson. I have been sitting for my miniature unknown to Charles; the painter has just sent it; I'll take this occasion of presenting it to him. Do but wait my return, and this affair shall be explained to your satisfaction.—[*To Simpson.*] Ah! Mr. Simpson, I never thought you capable of such doings. [*Exit, L.*

Brom. Was it your intention to insult me, Mr. Simpson, by your ridiculous accusations?

Simp. Sir, I—

Mrs. F. Is it your pleasure, Mr. Simpson, to surrender *Mysteriously,* the object in question?

Simp. Madam, madam, I assure you--

Mrs. S. 'Tis a clear case, Mr. Simpson: I shall now leave the affair with my relatives.

Simp. 'Tis a clear case there is a plot among you to drive me wild, and—

Enter FOSTER, R.

Fos. Mr. Simpson.

Simp. Well, Foster, what the devil do you want?

Fos. Mr. Tradely, sir, has called to receive back his securities.

Simp. Mr. Bromley has them.

Brom. I left them with you when I went out this morning.

Simp. True. [*Takes out Bromley's pocket-book; Mrs. Simpson regards it with looks of rage.*] Here they are, Foster; take a receipt for them. Here, Bromley, take your pocket-book. [*Exit Foster, R.*]

Mrs. S. [*Snatches it from him.*] His pocket-book?—Bromley's?

Simp. Yes: and what then?

Mrs. S. Really, the book is not yours?

Simp. And what if it were? but 'tis Bromley's, I tell you.

Mrs. S. [*Running into his arms.*] My dear, dear, dear little husband: this is the happiest moment of my life.

Mrs. F. [*Aside.*] 'Tis as I suspected.

Simp. Then you were but jesting with me, after all!

Mrs. S. [*To Mrs. Fitzallan.*] Oh, ma'am, I scarcely know how to apologise to you; but the circumstances, I trust, will be sufficient to—[*Running again to Simpson.*] My poor, poor, dear injured little Simpson!

Simp. Zounds! but this is as much a puzzle to me as t'other.

Brom. [*Aside.*] I perceive the mistake, and 'tis all over with me.

Mrs. F. [*Aside.*] Poor Mrs. Bromley!

Mrs. S. And can you pardon me all the torments I have inflicted on you?

Simp. Why, you have laid it on pretty thick, my dear, that's certain; but what has all this war been about?

Mrs. S. [*Returns the pocket-book to Bromley.*] Just let

me return Mr. Bromley his property. 'Tis an elegant little book, indeed; I commend your taste, sir.

Brom. [*Embarrassed.*] Oh, ma'am—'tis nothing—'tis simple—extremely simple.

Mrs. S. Certainly, it requires a careful examination to discover all the beauties it contains.

Mrs. F. [*Severely, and with emphasis.*] Mr. Bromley has been at unwarrantable pains in procuring its ornaments.

Simp. Wel, there's no accounting for tastes; but it seems to me that there's nothing very extraordinary in a red Morocco case with a gold clasp.

Mrs. S. My love, we must not always judge by the exterior.

Simp. [*Mocking her.*] By the exterior! Are they beginning their riddles again?

Brom. Alas! my dear friend, to me it is none; I comprehend it but too well.—[*To Mrs. Fitzallan.*] But to you, madam, how shall I address myself? I confess that, unknown to you, I dared to procure a copy of your portrait; and my indiscretion—

Mrs. F. [*As she takes the book from him, which he presents.*] The offence, Mr. Bromley, might warrant a harsher term.

Simp. Ha! a thought strikes me.—Allow me, ma'am, to ask whether or not you reside in Harley street?

Mrs. F. I do, sir.

Simp. Mahogany door, gorgon's-head knocker, five steps, lamp with reflectors, and sixty-four spikes in the iron railing?

Mrs. F. You have been very minute, sir, in your observations.

Simp. I had plenty of time to take an exact account, I assure you, I having twice enjoyed the honour, madam, of standing sentry at your door, waiting for this gentleman, and shivering in the wind, like the sails in the sea-song.—[*To Bromley, half angry.*] And am I, for ever, sir, to be the victim of your irregularities? 'Twas the same thing at school, ladies; if an orchard was robbed, suspicion was sure to light on me; and while Mr. Innocence, there, was quietly devouring the fruit, I was receiving the punishment.

Mrs. S. [*Taking his hand.*] My poor Simpson!

Mrs. F. [*To Bromley.*] So far as your indiscretion affects me, sir, I pardon you—deeply as it might have injured me in the opinion of this lady; but unfortunately for you, it yet remains—

Brom. Do not overwhelm me with the anger—the contempt—which my conduct merits. Your beauty was the light that dazzled and misled me, yet believe me—

Simp. Say no more, Bromley. You may believe him, ma'am; and I can assure you there is not in London a more affectionate husband—[*Half aside,*] notwithstanding his aptness to be dazzled, as he calls it, by stray lights.

Mrs. S. But what can we say to poor Mrs. Bromley?

Brom. I will avow all to her; the only explanation in the power of an offending husband, is the confession of his error.—Heavens! she comes.

Enter Mrs. BROMLEY, L.

Mrs. B. Well, Mr. Simpson, do you still refuse to ask pardon for your misconduct?

Simp. Ah! ma'am; matters have taken a strange turn since you quitted the room.

Brom. Ah! my Anna, you are far from suspecting who is the real offender; it is—

Mrs. F. [*Eagerly.*] It is Captain Walsingham.

Mrs. B. [*With astonishment.*] Captain Walsingham!

Brom. [*Aside.*] A woman for ever for helping one out of a scrape!

Mrs. F. Yes, the person I mentioned to you this morning. It is for him the portrait was copied.

Simp. And thus it is that innocent people are often made to suffer for the offences of such wicked wights. As for that Captain Walsingham—with whom Bromley and I are very well acquainted—I have a little account with him, which shall be settled in private. He shall not have it to say that I quietly took charge of this day's cargo of plagues and torments, which ought to have been consigned to him.

Mrs. B. But how came it, when he was mentioned this morning, that you remained silent?

Simp. To say the truth, I am not so proud of his acquaintance as to boast of it. A married man, who is so

easily "dazzled by stray lights," is not exactly the person to associate with—Eh, Bromley?

Mrs. B. [*To Mrs. Fitzallan.*] But by what means did the portrait—

Mrs. F. [*Mysteriously, and in an under tone.*] Hush!

Mrs. B. Aye—I understand:—[*Aside.*] That poor dear Mrs. Simpson! they make her believe just what they please!

Mrs. S. [*Aside.*] That dear good Mrs. Bromley—did she but know—

Mrs. B. And now, Charles, I have a little surprise for you. Unknown to you I have sat for my portrait; accept it as the token of my confidence in your fidelity; it may serve as a little lesson to Mr. Simpson.

Brom. [*Deeply affected.*] Your portrait!—Never, never shall it quit me.—“[*Aside.*] And she’s unconscious.—Oh! “Anna, the reproaches of an offended woman are soon “forgotten; her sweetness, her unsuspecting love, which “alone can reclaim a wandering heart, are remembered “for ever.

“*Mrs. B.* [*In an under tone, and looking towards Simpson.*] Be merciful, my love.”

Simp. [*Taking Bromley aside.*] Bromley, that present comes just in time; there’s a vacant place in the pocket-book.

Brom. A little indulgence—

Simp. You must ask it at other hands than mine.—[*Brings Bromley forward, looking cautiously, at the same time, at the other characters.*] Ladies and gentlemen, no doubt you have detected some little deficiencies in my partner’s private accounts—the firm is responsible to you—we are now winding up matters with you for the evening—we have done our best to answer your claims for amusement in full—if the balance appears against us, pray, grant a little indulgence to the firm of Simpson—and—Co.

THE END.



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